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Political Hospitality and Tourism:

Cuba and Nicaragua

by **PAUL HOLLANDER**

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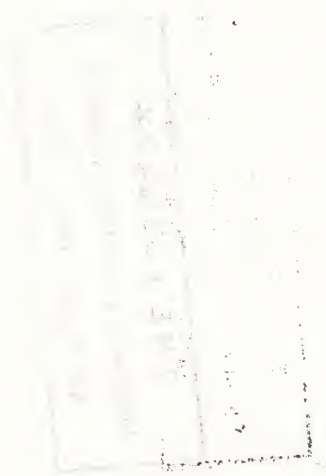
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POLITICAL HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM: Cuba and Nicaragua

By Paul Hollander



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1986

Paul Hollander

POLITICS OF HOSPITALITY: Political Tourists in Cuban and Nicaragua

We saw . . . a country where the great majority of people believe they are the makers and the beneficiaries of a new society . . . we were inspired. Cubans are characterized by . . . a burning desire for the rest of humanity to gain the freedoms that Cubans have so recently won. . . We returned hoping that our communities can lead America in developing humility we need to learn from Cuba.

Newsletter of the United Methodist Voluntary Service¹

In Havana I kept meeting Communists in the hotels for foreigners who had no idea that the energy and water supply in the working class quarters had broken down during the afternoon, that bread was rationed, and the population had to stand for two hours in line for a slice of pizza; meanwhile the tourists in their hotels were arguing about Lukacs. Hans Magnus Enzensberger²

. . . you can see people full of smiles. . . There is joy and enthusiasm for life and for work. . . We wanted to create in Nicaragua a joyful people who would sing and dance and this has been achieved. . . Nicaragua is the only country in the world which publishes the poetry of the police. Ernesto Cardenal³

Nicaragua's most important war is the one fought inside the United States. . . The battlefield will be the American conscience. . . When they (the visitors) return to the United States they have a multiplier effect on the public opinion of your country. . . Tomás Borge⁴

¹Rusty Davenport: "Cuba: A Land of Contrast", *Common Ground*, (A Newsletter of the United Methodist Voluntary Service), Summer 1981 quoted in *A Time for Candor: Mainline Churches and Radical Social Witness*, Washington, D.C., Institute on Religion and Democracy, 1983, p. 85.

²Hans Magnus Enzensberger: "Tourists of the Revolution" in *Consciousness Industry*, New York, 1974, p. 152.

³Ernesto Cardenal: "The Revolution is a Work of Love", *Nicaraguan Perspectives* (Berkeley), Fall 1981, pp. 6, 7.

⁴Tomás Borge quoted in Juan Tamayo: "Sandinistas Aim Soft Sell at Activists", *Miami Herald*, December 14, 1983.

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TRUE BELIEVERS

A group of senior citizens from Northern California, members of a coffee bean-picking brigade, gladly exchanged (for three weeks), the comforts of middle class life for the harsh realities of the Nicaraguan countryside. One of the volunteers explained: "... it is a privilege, an invigorating, rewarding experience... It is a joy to be doing something worthwhile."⁵

An attorney from a small town in Virginia reported—after a three day visit to Nicaragua undertaken "to form first-hand impressions"—"an exciting and vibrant spirit of independence."⁶ Michael Harrington, the democratic-socialist author, wrote: "I came back (from Nicaragua) far more ashamed of my country than at any time since the Vietnam war. The Nicaraguans... want to make a truly democratic revolution and it is we who subvert their decency."⁷ The Reverend William Sloan Coffin considered the foremost objective of the Nicaraguan regime "to stop the exploitation of the many by the few..." A group of religious citizens testified to "... a gentleness in the Nicaraguan nature, as exemplified by the words of Tomás Borge, Minister of Interior."⁸

Richard Barnett, a leading member of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington said that "To defend the right of the Nicaraguan people to conduct their experiment... is... an obligation of U.S. citizenship." Richard Falk, professor at Princeton University suggested that "... it seems imprudent for a progressive interpreter of Central America to dwell on the deficiencies of the Nicaraguan revolution..."⁹

Such and many similar statements indicate that in the early 1980's Nicaragua was highly popular with many Americans of different backgrounds, both as a country to visit and as a political system to defend in the United States. The significance of these attitudes transcends Nicaragua; they reflect recurrent susceptibilities in American (and Western) so-

ciety toward Marxist-Leninist systems which the latter carefully nurture and seek to enhance by the techniques of political hospitality.

Political hospitality consists of highly organized and purposeful efforts on the part of governments to display their political system and its various institutions in the most favorable light to foreign visitors; it is but one expression of the determination to persuade outsiders, and especially the elite groups of various countries, of the superior virtues of their society. While political hospitality is a matter of degree—all governments naturally prefer to be seen in a positive light and take some steps to attain this objective—fully developed forms of it can only be found in countries where the government has a monopoly of political power, as in the Marxist-Leninist one-party systems of our times.

There are a number of preconditions for the unhindered exercise of political hospitality. The first is the determination of the rulers to shape the image of their country in accordance with well-defined political objectives and ideological principles. Such a determination and the policies flowing from it rest, in turn, on the belief that they preside over a historically superior social system and are engaged in a collective enterprise the ends of which justify virtually all means including those used to increase its appeals among visitors and public opinion abroad. These power-holders being Marxists-Leninist, generally believe in the importance of ideas as weapons in the political struggle, including the ideas people—and especially influential people—abroad entertain about their society.

Secondly, the rulers of the country that extends political hospitality must have control over the material-economic resources of the country in order to make the kind of allocations the techniques of hospitality require. There must be state control over resorts, hotels, means of transportation, the training of guides and interpreters, funds for prestige or show-case projects (e.g., model prisons, farms, housing, clinics, schools, child-care centers, etc.). As a former supporter of Cuba, the Chilean Jorge Edwards observed: "... the socialist economy could concentrate its efforts on a small sector and obtain marvelous results, which were visible and highly suitable for impressing foreign visitors..."¹⁰

Thirdly, political hospitality greatly benefits from a docile or intimidated population that will not question publicly the "definitions of reality" foreign visitors are given by the authorities; people who know that

⁵"Americans work free in Nicaraguan fields" AP Report, *Daily Hampshire Gazette* (Northampton, Mass.), January 24, 1985, p. 40.

⁶Larry Hoover: "Attorney Visits Nicaragua", *Daily News Record* (Harrisonburg, Va.), January 3, 4, 1986.

⁷Michael Harrington: "Economic Troubles Besetting Nicaragua", *New York Times*, Op-ed page, July 16, 1981.

⁸William Sloan Coffin: "Nicaragua Is Not An Enemy", *New York Times*, Op-ed page, July 31, 1983; "Nicaragua Visited", *The Churchman*, April-May 1984, p. 16.

⁹"The U.S. Left and Nicaragua", *The Nation*, April 20, 1985, pp. 456, 458.

¹⁰Jorge Edwards: *Persona Non Grata*, New York, 1977, p. 198.

unauthorized contacts with foreigners are inadvisable and criticisms of the regime communicated to them even more so.

A Cuban citizen wrote: "Here we have no human rights, no peace and not even the right to subsist, if you are not . . . ready to play their comedy trying to show the world that we are free and owners of our decision and future, thousands . . . had played this play during twenty one years. . . Here everybody is afraid of everyone and you can't believe in anyone. . ." Another observer noted: "Fearing denunciation, Cubans are . . . reluctant to reveal themselves to an inquiring foreigner or even to friends. . ."¹¹

Given the preconditions noted above, it is not surprising that the techniques of political hospitality reached their highest level of development in the communist societies of our times. (I am using the term "communist" to refer to one-party systems which legitimate themselves by ideas derived from Marxism-Leninism and share many institutional characteristics especially in areas of political and economic controls.) These techniques were pioneered by the Soviet Union as early as the 1920's and adopted by every successive communist regime. Besides the Soviet Union and China, Vietnam and Cuba and most recently Nicaragua, are the most notable historical examples of the implementation of these techniques.

It should be noted that political hospitality serves not only political but also economic purposes. Every communist country—with the possible exceptions of Albania and North Korea—has been eager to improve its economy by acquiring Western currencies through tourism. This is not to say that these countries would allow economic considerations override political ones; communist countries place limits on tourism and prefer group tours; they concentrate tourists in particular areas, resorts or hotels; sightseeing activities are restricted to approved sites and large parts of the country remain closed to tourists. David Caute, the English author wrote of his visit to Cuba: "... the tourist . . . is dispatched in pursuit of factories, schools, universities, housing projects and research institutes

. . . his holiday is not treated as an escape . . . but as a chance to penetrate the virtues of the socialist model."¹²

It is important to point out that despite the magnitude of the efforts and resources devoted to political hospitality, its impact has always been dependent on the climate of opinion prevailing in the countries the tourists came from and on their predisposition or receptivity to the messages conveyed to them by their hosts. Political hospitality by itself rarely changed the minds of people or created enduringly favorable images of the countries which dispensed it. There has always been an interplay between the expectations and attitudes of the visitors and the experiences and impressions they acquired in the course of their guided tours. Heberto Padilla commented on such tourists "disillusioned by the arthritic socialist experiences of Europe, they imagined they had found spontaneity here in a budding revolution. . . Every revolution, however remote, personified for them the ideal which their nation lacked. . ."¹³ It was also observed of the visitors to Nicaragua that "for many, travelling here confirms an already solid belief in what the Sandinistas are trying to do."¹⁴

Correspondingly, the propensity to visit countries boasting of putatively superior social arrangements almost invariably emerges at times when social, economic or cultural conditions in the countries of the tourists become problematic or unsatisfactory. Thus the great waves of tourism or pilgrimages to the Soviet Union arose when Western countries, including the United States, were beset by the economic difficulties and disorders of the Depression in the late 1920's and early 1930's; trips to Cuba, Vietnam and China became popular in the United States during the 1960's and early 70's, when, besides the Vietnam war, domestic problems surfaced (i.e. racial conflict and a malaise associated with "empty affluence") and persuaded some groups that alternatives to what they regarded as unjust and oppressive social-political arrangements of their own country must be found. Most recently, the upsurge of sympathy toward Nicaragua has been closely connected with the aversion the Reagan administration has inspired among segments of the American

¹¹"A Cuban's Letter: 'No Human Rights'", *New York Times*, Op-ed page, December 3, 1980; Edward Gonzales: *Cuba Under Castro: The Limits of Charisma*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974, p. 9.

¹²For a book length study of political hospitality and its major recipients see Paul Hollander: *Political Pilgrims—Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928-1978*, New York: Oxford University Press 1981 and Harper & Row 1983.

¹³David Caute: *Cuba Yes?*, New York, 1974, p. 49; on recent Cuban efforts to expand tourism see M.A. Moore: "Cuba Strives to Increase Tourism", *The Miami News*, October 16, 1981.

¹⁴Heberto Padilla: *Heroes Are Grazing in My Garden*, New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984, pp. 121, 122.

¹⁵Edward Cody: "Americans Pay Homage to a Revolution", *Washington Post*, July 23, 1985.

public and with the conviction that if his administration was opposed to the Sandinistas, this by itself proved that they deserved the support of right-thinking citizens.

Given the general decline of the attractiveness of the Soviet model—long ceased to be seen as a revolutionary vanguard or “new experiment” in establishing an authentic socialist society—and given the political changes and revelations following the death of Mao in China, neither of these countries remained capable of evoking the sympathy and admiration they once inspired. While their techniques of political hospitality are unchanged the number of favorably disposed Western visitors has sharply declined and reverential travelogues about them now rarely appear.

Newly united Vietnam too lost its earlier, war-time glamor due to the exodus of over a million boatpeople, its continued militarization and close ties with the Soviet Union. It was easier to idealize it as an opponent of the United States and an apparent underdog fighting under the banner of national unity and socialism, than today as an impoverished garrison state invading its smaller Cambodian neighbor.

While the appeals of Cuba have also substantially declined, it has not yet been totally discredited either on the media, or among the intellectuals, or church groups. Cuba has retained an enthusiastic if small following among academics and church people who continue to be impressed by its perceived achievements and have remained recipients of Cuban political hospitality. Curiously enough, despite its police state aspects, severe shortages, religious repression, the outflow of over one million refugees, the persecution of homosexuals (among others), the maintenance of an enormous military establishment and its unhesitating support for Soviet policies, Cuba's reputation suffered much less, although the range of opinion on Cuba is divided, even in liberal-left circles. It is likely that Cuba's relative success in preserving a positive image has been largely due to Castro's continued presence and predominance—he represents, at least in the eyes of the sympathetic beholders, revolutionary continuity and personifies the revolutionary mystique, and remains a charismatic figure. The animosity of successive American administrations towards Cuba has also contributed to the persistence of a measure of support for Castro among those whose political sympathies are shaped, above all, by their own adversary positions; for them the enemy of their enemy is invariably a friend.

In view of what was said above, the rise of Nicaragua to preeminent status among the countries to be idealized is easy to understand. Here

was at last a *new* revolutionary socialist regime, a *small* country earlier victimized and dominated by the United States, now ruled by a group of idealistic young revolutionaries locked in mortal combat with the United States. Here was a new regime untarnished (at least in the eyes of its supporters) by association with the Soviet Union, or the mistakes and excesses of other socialist systems. An enormous reservoir of goodwill has been available for the Sandinistas facilitating their projection of a favorable image of their policies and institutions. Political tourism to Nicaragua soon became a major expression of support for that regime. The Nicaraguan authorities well aware of the political importance of public opinion in the United States developed an ambitious program of political hospitality. They greatly benefited from the lessons of Vietnam.¹⁶

Cuban and Nicaraguan political hospitality aimed essentially at the same goals and used the same techniques. It had two major components: first, the creation of strengthening of favorable attitudes among visitors by “ego massage”, that is, by making the tour a pleasant experience both physically and psychologically, by attending to the needs of the visitors and catering to their self-esteem. Such treatment creates or contributes to a sense of obligation or indebtedness toward the generous host; it also helps to stifle or defuse critical sentiments.

The second major component of political hospitality is the screening of reality, the controlled presentation of what there is to see, the selective display of the features of the country—human, social, institutional. Political hospitality seeks to minimize chance encounters and experiences and generally succeeds in excluding unfavorable impressions.

To these generalizations it should be added that the basic principles of political hospitality here outlined are not uniformly applied; the more important the visitors, the greater efforts will be made to make them feel well liked, comfortable, etc., and to expose them to the most carefully selected encounters and sights, the most inspiring experiences.

The obvious premise of these methods—personal attentiveness and selective display—is that people generalize from personal experience; hence, it is desirable to make such experiences both pleasant and politically instructive. Thus, even if the tourists arrive armed with critical anticipations (or a sound knowledge of the political system and its shortcomings (which is rarely the case), there will be few opportunities for them to confirm such anticipations by what they see or hear. (Nicara-

¹⁶For an illuminating analysis of such parallels see Doan Van Toai and David Chanoff: “Learning from Vietnam”, *Encounter*, Sept-Oct. 1982.

gua as of this writing is a partial exception to this: since the rulers are somewhat constrained to tolerate a residual pluralism or symbolic opposition, visitors may still have experiences which will not support all the claims of the regime and will find people willing to voice criticism. However, as the power of the regime expands, there will be fewer and fewer discordant voices contesting the messages the authorities seek to convey.)

I will in the following first examine Cuban political hospitality and its potential contribution to the images held about that regime in the United States.

TECHNIQUES OF CONTROL

Political hospitality is not only a series of measures designed to make conspicuous the attractive aspects of a society—it is also a system of prevention, filtering and censorship. It begins with efforts to ensure that the impressions of the visitor will not be contaminated by unauthorized and uncontrolled contacts and experiences. In these efforts the guide-interpreters play a crucial part. An English journalist wrote:

Visitors to Cuba are normally assigned a guide and if they travel outside Havana they are expected to take a Cuban chauffeur and hire a car... Cuban guides allotted to western visitors are invariably highly sophisticated party persons...

Controls over the visitors' movements are facilitated by the official provision of transportation:

Every taxi journey is logged at a special office inside each major hotel. You are required to give your destination and your name and hotel room. These are then copied into a log. These logs are openly examined at regular intervals by the police.

... Visitors also need to take good care of the hotel cards they are given when they register... These give the visitor's name, hotel and room number. Without these cards it is virtually impossible to do anything.¹⁷

¹⁷Ian Mather: "Even the taxi driver spies on you", *Business Traveller*, Nov.-Dec. 1979, pp. 36, 37.

These observations were corroborated by another visitor describing arrangements at the Hotel Habana Libre: "The police stop any unauthorized Cuban who tries to slip into this palace of imperialist delights. Another cop waits at the foot of the grand staircase questioning anyone who looks suspect."¹⁸

The pervasiveness of the controls is further illustrated by the following observations:

The delegate... receives a personal guide who functions as translator, nanny, and watchdog. Almost all contact... is mediated through this companion, which makes distinct the delegate's separation from the social realities surrounding him. The companion is responsible for the traveller's program... The combination of being spoiled and impotent is reminiscent of an infantile situation.¹⁹

The presence of the guide-interpreter is not the only obstacle to frank exchanges between natives and visitors. As a recent report noted, "Cubans understand full well the rules... and most obey unquestioningly. They know who is authorized to speak with foreigners..."²⁰ Carlos Ripoll, a former Cuban citizen, commented: "One can easily imagine the disdain and frustration with which Cubans look upon foreign reporters—often officially escorted and always friendly toward the regime—who stop them to ask naively: 'Amigo, are you happy with the revolution? What do you think of Fidel Castro?'"²¹ Sam Farber, another former citizen of Cuba and specialist on pre-revolutionary Cuban history, said, after revisiting his native country that "no Cuban who is really discontented will talk to a stranger."²² He also pointed out that restrictions intensify "before a big international get-together", that is, when opportunities for meeting foreigners are the most abundant. Controls over foreign correspondents and reporters are especially tight and the attempts to influence them predate their actual arrival. As revealed by a former Cuban intelligence agent Juan Vives:

¹⁸William Scobie: "In Castro's Havana, life is waiting for hours for ice cream", *Florida Times-Union*, August 23, 1985.

¹⁹Enzensberger cited p. 135-136.

²⁰Castro's Cuba: Progress but at a high price", *U.S. News and World Report*, August 20, 1984, p. 34.

²¹Carlos Ripoll: "The Price of Socialist Riches", *New York Times*, January 19, 1975, Op-ed page.

²²"A Look at Cuba Today", *Changes*, July-Aug. 1980, p. 14.

In the subtle process of influencing the news nothing is left to chance. Extensive files are kept on all significant newspapers and periodicals around the world... Whenever a foreign correspondent applies for a visit to Cuba, his entire personal career is reviewed for any sign of vulnerability or weakness of character. His hotel room is bugged... and whenever he leaves it, he is followed by surveillance experts... Any document or photograph that the foreign reporter obtains that might be damaging to Cuba is retrieved by arranged assault or fake robbery...

In fact police control within Cuba is so severe that there is virtually no circulation of typewritten copies of unauthorized literature such as occurs in Eastern Europe and Russia...²³

Vivian Warner Dudro, in her study of the American press coverage of Cuba, (based on interviews with journalists) found much to support the above. For example, "Every journalist agreed that one of the major obstacles to investigative reporting in Cuba is the tightly controlled transportation system." She also learned that "many people... will not be interviewed without permission from their local Committee for the Defense of the Revolution." Sometimes journalists were taken on officially sponsored sightseeing tours without realizing it, as was the case of "One journalist... taken to Ramon Castro's farm [a standard way-station of many itineraries] when he asked a cab driver to take him to a farm".²⁴

Frances Fitzgerald reported over a decade ago that she and other journalists "could not arrange a trip of more than an hour outside Havana." She also bore witness to the connection between the generous political hospitality received and a diminished journalistic willingness to press for particular targets of reporting:

It was embarrassing for us to make demands [regarding itineraries] since the government insisted on treating us as guests and keeping us in a style to which even Cuban officials are not accustomed. Each of us who stayed behind after the [Anniversary] Celebrations was given a car and

driver, and at the Capri we had air-conditioned rooms, meals with beer and wine and as much meat each day as the Cuban rationing system allows an individual for a week.²⁵

When tourists deviated from the officially arranged itineraries and activities the authorities had no hesitation to intervene:

Most of the time the Cubans take us around in a tightly arranged schedule leaving little free time. But today... three of us decided to walk through old Havana... We take a photo of a typical line of citizens waiting to obtain rationed goods at a department store. Within a few moments, a uniformed officer appears. He signals that we are to come with him.

The next few hours are spent in the local police station... Finally, an officer appears: "You can go now. But you must understand that the revolutionary process is complex... Our struggle is difficult. You can take pictures of anything... but no pictures of rationing lines."²⁶

Following in the Soviet tradition of political hospitality Cuban guides would sometimes plead ignorance of the location of particular sights, or difficulty of access to them: "... when we ask to see the largest synagogue in Havana, our guide says he does not know where it is and forgets to find out..."²⁷

As noted earlier, a major thrust of political hospitality, in Cuba and elsewhere, is to make the visitor feel appreciated and comfortable, materially as well as psychologically. The techniques for accomplishing this vary according to the importance of the visitors or the type of the group. The reception given to members of the American Venceremos Brigade, a pro-Castro group volunteering manual labor, obviously made a deep impression:

People were standing on the deck of the ship coming toward us wearing orange sweatshirts with the Brigada

²³Frances Fitzgerald in *The New Yorker*, February 18, 1974, p. 41; see also in Ronald Radosh, ed.: *New Cuba*, New York, 1976, p. 144.

²⁶Ronald Radosh: "Cuba: A Personal Report", *Liberation*, January 1974, pp. 26-27.

²⁷Suzanne Garment: "Cuban Politics: Living With the Lies", *The Wall Street Journal*, April 19, 1985, p. 29.

²³Cord Meyer: "But spies and agents cloud Castro's intentions", *The Evening Sun* (Baltimore), May 7, 1982; see also Juan Vives: *The Masters of Cuba* (in French), Paris, 1981.

²⁴Vivian Warner Dudro: "Covering Cuba", Paper delivered at the Conference on *The Media and the Cuban Revolution*, Washington, D.C., November 1984, pp. 11, 13.

Venceremos insignia. The ship circled us... Everywhere along the harbor people stood watching us come in. The Cubans were smiling, waving and giving us the clenched fist symbol of revolutionary solidarity. We had arrived: revolutionary Cuba, a dream in progress in the Western hemisphere. We were ecstatic.

Arrival by air could be equally festive:

... a shout of joy and triumph as the plane touched down ... and we stepped out. The first free soil I had ever known... Smiles everywhere, bright lights as the Cuban newsmen filmed our joy... A trio of singers played Latin music and "Che" smiled from a portrait on the wall as daiquiris and hors d'oeuvres were offered. Singing, talking, drinking together in José Martí airport in Havana, in Revolutionary Cuba.²⁸

Another group of enthusiasts from Australia received similar treatment:

Much was made of the fact that we were the *primera brigada* from Australia and after a month of being feted and honored we began to feel like Princess Di.

... We arrived at the Julio Mella Campamento Internacional in some style. A police motorcycle escort, a police car with blaring siren and an ambulance accompanied us all the way from the airport (and were to escort us in similar fashion for the rest of our stay)... The fact that it was midnight had not deterred the entire staff from lining up at the entrance to applaud our arrival.²⁹

An American businessman travelling in a group of six (including a U.S. senator) described his arrival:

The grand design of our tour... became clearer some two hours out of Havana when we arrived at our lodgings. The Cuban government had selected a marble-floored seaside

villa at Veradero Beach once owned by the Bacardi family of rum fame. Assured that the Bacardi's no longer planned to use the house, we settled in with a small platoon of foreign ministry personnel, chauffeurs, waiters and kitchen staff. An official welcoming dinner awaited us...

... The cornerstone of all arrangements was the "hot line" telephone in our villa, which seemed to be in constant use, day and night. Via this life-line, Havana could monitor our progress through housing projects, schools, national shrines, cattle-breeding farms and recreational centers.

... When we forayed into public restaurants... The lead car would disgorge several security men who would enter the restaurant, check out the restrooms and tables and then lead our entourage to a secure dining location in the corner of the room.

... In administrative matters... one finds a lightness of spirit more reminiscent of an East German border post. Hotel elevator operators... function effectively as wardens, checking passengers' room identifications before permitting access to each floor.³⁰

Some of the distinguished visitors evinced at least a fleeting unease upon encountering the luxuries heaped on them. Thus Sartre remarked on his "millionaire hotel room" in a veritable "fortress of luxury." Angela Davis, the American communist party functionary (and vice-presidential candidate) calmed her conscience by recalling that "the Habana Libre, formerly Havana Hilton [was] now freed from the veined fingers of decadent old capitalists. This was the first time I had stayed in such a fancy hotel..."³¹ On the other hand, Ernesto Cardenal (who was to become a member of the Nicaraguan revolutionary government) noted without any apparent unease, the "sumptuous dining room" of the National Hotel in Havana, where he was offered, among other things, "lobster thermidor, frog legs, French wine" and where the "uniformed waiters were not servile but companionable; they didn't call you 'sir' but 'comrade'"—a change in terminology that for Cardenal seemed to have a mo-

²⁸Sandra Levinson and Carol Brightman, eds.: *Venceremos Brigade*, New York, 1971, pp. 74-75.

²⁹Meredith Burgman: "The Australian Brigade", *The National Times* (Sydney), March 1, 1984.

³⁰Ned W. Bandler Jr.: "Taking the Cuban Tour", *Freedom at Issue*, Nov.-Dec. 1977, pp. 6,8,9.

³¹Sartre on Cuba, New York, 1961, p. 47; Angela Davis: *An Autobiography*, New York, 1974, p. 203.

mentous significance, compensating for the fundamental asymmetry of the situation he described.³² He was not the only admirer of Cuba who commented on the excellence of the provisions: Andrew Salkey, a West Indian author making his home in the United States made reference to items such as "delicious criollo pork, rice and wild salad" and other joyous meals cooked to perfection.³³

International conferences always put Cuban political hospitality into high gear. In 1979 for instance, participants at the Conference of the so-called Non-Aligned Movement, were provided with no fewer than 117 new Mercedes automobiles, among other vehicles.³⁴ Salkey, a delegate at the 1968 Cultural Congress admitted to a "certain amount of uneasiness" upon contemplating his privileges as compared with the way the average Cuban lived. (Mercifully this uneasiness "wore off") The privileges included "... the free, all-in luxurious hotel ... four enormous dining rooms to choose from, an international cuisine (changed daily), free laundry service, free telephone ... free taxi cabs and Congress cars and buses ... free entry to the city's theatres and exhibitions ... added to all that, my return air ticket ... plus my overweight also paid ... Too much, too much to accept." But in the end, he accepted it all perhaps in part because he persuaded himself that the lavish hospitality was "little inspired by ideological gain". There were also "going away presents" for the delegates: books, records, posters, cigars, numerous bottles of rum of various size and type, etc.³⁵

Even regular tourists (as distinct from politically important delegates) were given privileges: "... foreigners can now jump the perennial lines for taxis and restaurants ... 'Cubans don't mind' insisted Jesús Jiménez, the vice president of the Cuban Tourism Institute."³⁶ There have also been special shops established where tourists (and members of the Cuban elite) can buy scarce consumer goods and food for foreign currency.

In Cuba as in other similar societies the leaders themselves played an important part in political hospitality. Castro in particular took it upon himself to meet and befriend important visitors—politicians, businessmen, journalists, selected intellectuals—a part he played with great skill and considerable success. Meeting Castro was by itself an event that

made the chosen visitors feel important and appreciated. Sometimes Castro took the visitor on whirlwind tours of inspection all over the country, often himself driving. ("... Barbara Walters recounted that he [Castro] offered to take her any place on the island.")³⁷ One of the first to benefit from such attentions was the famous American sociologist the late C. Wright Mills, who spent three and a half days with Castro "devoting an average of 18 hours in every 24 to discussions"; he was informed by Castro that his *Power Elite* "had been a bedside book of most of the guerrilleros in the Sierra Maestra."³⁸

Castro also charmed and overwhelmed Sartre, who came to see him as a renaissance man, a charismatic hero, who "exercis[ed] a veritable dictatorship over [his] needs [and] ... roll[ed] back the limits of the possible."³⁹ Senator McGovern was equally impressed—following a personal sightseeing tour with Castro—especially by Castro's knowledge of "almost any subject from agricultural methods to Marxist dialectics to American politics."⁴⁰ He left Cuba convinced that "from all indications, Castro has the support and outright affection of his people."⁴¹ Castro apparently also succeeded in establishing a close personal relationship with Pierre Trudeau, prime minister of Canada, which benefited his regime.⁴²

While Castro has been in the forefront of such encounters, Ernesto "Che" Guevara also used to meet important visitors as did Castro's brother Ramón. Members of the Australian brigade reported being "taken to visit a 'genetic' dairy farm. There shaking hands with each of us ... was a tall sturdy figure in olive green army fatigues, green cap, grey-black beard, dark glasses and smoking a huge cigar... It was only after we'd all been greeted that we discovered he was Fidel's big brother, Ramón. He won our hearts immediately with his avuncular good humor, his naturalness and his willingness to answer all questions."⁴³

³²Charles Bartlett: "The Castro the TV specials don't show us", *The Washington Star*, June 15, 1977.

³³K. S. Karol: *Guerrillas in Power*, New York, 1970, p. 58.

³⁴Sartre quoted pp. 102, 103.

³⁵George McGovern: *Grassroots: The Autobiography of George McGovern*, New York, 1977, pp. 267-77.

³⁶Quoted in Carlos Ripoll: "Did Fidel 'seduce' McGovern?", *The Washington Star*, April 13, 1977.

³⁷John D. Harbron: "Trudeau, Castro: Pals for 25 Years", *The Miami Herald*, December 31, 1983.

³⁸Meredith Burgmann cited.

³⁹Ernesto Cardenal: *In Cuba*, New York, 1974, p. 4.

⁴⁰Andrew Salkey: *Havana Journal*, Harmondsworth, England, 1971, pp. 195, 218.

⁴¹Flora Lewis: "Havana Parley: Long on Oratory", *New York Times*, September 5, 1979, Op-ed page.

⁴²Salkey cited, pp. 25 and 210.

⁴³Alan Riding: "Castro Offers to Give His All", *New York Times*, June 23, 1982.

Occasionally political hospitality extended to the display of prisons, or model prisons, or parts of prisons spruced up for the benefit of important visitors:

What the Rev. Jessie Jackson saw . . . was a clean, painted prison where inmates played baseball—a scene, one released prisoner says, is “very different from the way of life in Cuban prisons.” . . . Officials worked for a week cleaning and painting the outside of the prison in preparation for Mr. Jackson’s visit. . . The morning of Mr. Jackson’s visit ‘common’ [i.e. non-political—] prisoners were assembled hastily, given new baseball uniforms and equipment and told to play ball . . . as soon as he [Jackson] left, the balls and bats were taken away and the prisoners returned to their cells.”

Such elaborate preparations, including special diets and ‘extra things like Kool-Aid’ are routine when foreign delegations visit Cuban prisons, Mr. Noble [a released prisoner] said.

“Jesse Jackson did not see the jail as it usually is,” he said. “Many delegations come and believe the country is what they gave been shown. . . For example, the inside of the prison has never seen any paint. And for those political prisoners left behind, there is no medical aid.” Even when foreign delegations visit the prisons, political prisoners . . . are kept in their cells in a separate part of the prison. Prisoners convicted of non-political crimes are those given extra food and allowed to play baseball.⁴³

Another unusual event that occurred during the Jackson visit was a special church service for the obvious benefit of Jackson attended by Castro himself.⁴⁵ If the Reverend found it strange that the head of a militantly atheist state would attend such a service, there is no public record of it. (The incident may remind the reader of Brezhnev’s attempt to impress

⁴³L. Nall: “Prisoner says Cubans fooled Jackson on jail”, *Washington Times*, July 2, 1984; Jole Brinkley: “70 Innings of Baseball, Then Freedom”, *New York Times*, June 30, 1984; “Freed prisoners look back in anger at long years in Cuba”, *Los Angeles Herald*, June 30, 1984.

⁴⁴Dudro cited p. 24.

President Carter by remarking at their summit meeting in Vienna, that God would never forgive them if they had not reached an agreement on disarmament—a comment that made at the time, a deep impression on Mr. Carter.)

PREDISPOSED POLITICAL TOURISTS

It should be stressed again that the effectiveness of political hospitality depends greatly on the predisposition of its recipients. The suspension of critical faculties and the wish to believe are crucial. If so, even political imprisonment may be viewed as excusable—redeemed by its goals, as it were—by those sympathetic toward the regime. Thus Bishop James Armstrong and Rev. Russell Dillely wrote, in their “Statement of Church Persons after Visiting Cuba, June 19-28, 1977: “ . . . there is a significant difference between situations where people are imprisoned for opposing regimes designed to perpetuate inequities (as in Chile and Brazil, for example) and situations where people are imprisoned for opposing regimes designed to remove inequities (as in Cuba).”⁴⁶ Underlying this justification is the belief that the Cuban system has in fact removed the inequities and political prisoners are jailed for opposing such policies (!), and, most importantly, that ends justify means—a view especially remarkable when taken by churchmen. In the same spirit Richard Falk, well-known social critic and proponent of American policies abroad, said of the current leaders of Nicaragua: “They may be brutal, they may be imprudent in certain ways, but I think they are basically trying to create a much fairer social and economic order for their people.”⁴⁷ Good intentions thus remove the moral stigma of questionable means.

Another time honored method of rationalizing the restrictions on personal and political freedom in Cuba (and elsewhere) has been to define them as luxuries, or ethnocentric Western values of no interest to the ordinary citizens of the countries concerned. Andrew Zimbalist, a professor of economics at Smith College in Massachusetts pointed out that “Cuba should . . . be judged by different standards of personal freedom . . . Cuba does not have the luxury of allowing the kind of political openness that we have in the U.S.”⁴⁸ Knowing little about the specifics of such restrictions and about the political violence used by the regime made it

⁴⁶Quoted in *A Time for Candor*, cited, p. 81.

⁴⁷“The Confessions of Richard Falk”, *Prospect*, November 1983, p. 9.

⁴⁸Mark Averit: “Smith professor describes life and economy in Cuba”, *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, July 11, 1984.

easier to take this position. As early as in 1961 a street protest by poor women near the Cuban beach resort of Varadero was brutally crushed next to this popular tourist town. Carlos Franqui recalled: "On my way back to Havana I passed through Varadero and wondered what sort of Cuba the visitors were seeing while ten minutes away there was a carnival of persecution in full swing. These people saw a stage-set Cuba, not the reality we had to live in every day, and they took the part for the whole."⁴⁹

When favorable predisposition combines with ignorance and lack of imagination, the visitors' capacity for absorbing the messages of political hospitality greatly expands. It would not occur to a retired physician from a small New England town on a conducted tour (member of "a religious study group") that he might have been taken to the same farmhouse and the same old lady as countless others before him, regaled with the same story ("We sipped straight rum while we listened to the elderly woman tell how before the revolution she had often been hungry and how after the revolution, even though old, she had been taught to read and write"⁵⁰). It may also be noted here that such "before and after" presentations by old people have been standard fares of political hospitality not only in Cuba but also in the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam and similar countries. The contrived nature of such visits was vividly described by a former Cuban guide-interpreter in the film "Improper Conduct", including the practice of stopping, in a seemingly random manner, at the same apartment in the same (model) housing project with group after group, where the (same) residents extended their hospitality to the foreigners offering provisions generally unavailable to the public.

Another example of the combination of credulousness and ignorance can be found in the reaction of sympathetic foreigners to the giant rallies and marches, taken to be evidence of the popular support enjoyed by the government: "... imagine thousands upon thousands of people slowly moving forward, five, six, sometimes ten steps at a time and then waiting ... sometimes in the shade but most times under the punishing ... sun." Another supporter wrote: "... the March of the Fighting People had mobilized five million Cubans, including the stunning procession of some two million in Havana that marched ... for eight hours ... in a show of disciplined strength that has little rival in history... [T]here have of

course been many rivals: in Moscow, Peking and especially at Nuremberg during the Nazis.] There was serenity and order to the streets..."⁵¹

A former citizen of Cuba had no difficulty explaining the phenomenon: "People are always amazed how Castro gets half a million people to show up... Basically when he talks they shut down certain parts of the factories, shut down the schools, bus half a million people to Havana and don't let them leave until he is finished."⁵²

While, as noted above, the effectiveness of Cuban political hospitality cannot be assessed without taking into account the predisposition and political beliefs of the visitors, it doubtless has made a contribution to the maintenance of a relatively favorable image of the regime. This is all the more noteworthy since the Cuban propaganda efforts have been counterbalanced by the presence of hundreds of thousands of Cuban exiles in the United States who have no illusions about the character of that political system. Nonetheless many myths and illusions about Cuba continue to find receptive audiences among those estranged from and hostile to American society. Cuban political hospitality has been successful in confirming and solidifying the beliefs of those who were susceptible to its messages in the first place.

The New Political Mecca

It is not surprising that political hospitality in Nicaragua has much in common with its Cuban counterparts since Cuba has served in general as the model for the new regime. (The Nicaraguan leaders had a longstanding relationship with the Cuban authorities, receiving training, advice and material assistance from Castro while in the underground.) Like in Cuba, as little as possible is left to chance. A former Nicaraguan official of the Interior Ministry, Alvaro Baldizon explained: "Security agents pretending to be photographers, journalists or relatives of people in the region to be visited frequently join the delegations ... on their trips... They report to the Ministry on the groups' itinerary. Using advance notice... Borge [minister of interior] sends teams of people to be on the routes used and in the localities to be visited. These are called 'casual encounter' teams

⁴⁹Carlos Franqui: *Family Portrait with Fidel, A Memoir*, New York, 1984, pp. 144-145.

⁵⁰Edward Mannell: "City traveler finds country vastly changed", *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, April 4, 1984.

⁵¹William Lee Brent: "The People's March", *The Black Scholar*, July-Aug 1980, p. 50 and Robert Christman: "Cuba: Forge of the Revolution" *Ibid.* pp. 60-61.

⁵²Modesto Maidique: "Fidel's Plantation", *The Stanford Magazine*, Winter 1983, p. 31.

... pretending to be local residents... They describe alleged contra atrocities and the benefits of the Sandinista revolution..."⁵³

The Nicaraguan policies of political hospitality have possibly been even more ambitious than those of Cuba, more explicit and specific in their political objectives. The goal of the Sandinistas was not merely to create a generally favorable image of their regime in the United States—their carefully calculated propaganda campaigns (of which political hospitality was but one manifestation) were aimed at particular political targets. Above all they were seeking to persuade American public opinion and policymakers to cease all support for the Contras and for the remaining pockets of peaceful opposition. They were seeking to project the image of a small, poor, victimized country, beset by economic difficulties caused by the guerrilla war (and the United States), of a government committed to political and economic pluralism, leaders who were flexible egalitarian idealists inspired more by religion than Marxism-Leninism and who were most unhappy about diverting scarce resources to warfare. They also claimed to pursue a blend of (true) Christianity and form of socialism untainted by the mistakes of the older Soviet-type regimes. They vocally asserted their independence from the Soviet Union except for the necessity of accepting assistance refused by the United States. The hostility of the United States left no alternative but pushing Nicaragua closer to the Soviet Union and Cuba—a myth identical to that surrounding Castro's relationship to the Soviet Union. (According to Susan Kaufman Purcell, director of the Latin-American program at the Council on Foreign Relations, Shirley Christian, in her *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family*, "provides convincing evidence that the Sandinista leaders intended to establish a Leninist system from the day they marched into Managua.")⁵⁴

Another distinctive goal of Nicaraguan political hospitality has been to convey an impression of political pluralism not claimed by other similar regimes.

A strategy of deception or "manto" (the Spanish word for cloak) had deep roots in the political history of the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional). As traced by Douglas W. Payne:

⁵³"Nicaraguan Defector Details Sandinista Repression", Newsletter, Council for Democracy in the Americas, Washington, D.C., December 5, 1985, p. 6.

⁵⁴Susan Kaufman Purcell: "Behind a Revolution", *New York Times*, July 20, 1985. Similar evidence can also be found in Humberto Belli: *Christians Under Fire*, Puebla Institute, Garden City, Michigan, 1984 and in his *Braking the Faith: The Sandinista Revolution and Its Impact on Freedom and Christian Faith in Nicaragua*, Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1985.

The *manto* is one of ... [the] basic tenets of guerrilla war and revolutionary strategy with which Sandinista leaders and cadres became engrained under political-military training that began in the Soviet Union and Cuba during the late 1950's...

... As a political weapon over and above the more generally recognized tactical techniques of disinformation. It [i.e. the manto or deception] is central to the success and survival of any Marxist-Leninist revolutionary group that aims to secure and expand a foothold in close proximity to its perceived and powerful enemy."⁵⁵

Thus the Sandinista deceptions have in some ways been more purposeful and carefully thought out than those encountered in other similar systems which at least did not seek to misrepresent to the same degree their basic policies and institutional patterns. The Sandinistas were also adept at tailoring their messages to the proclivities of different audiences as reported by an American journalist: "To American visitors, frequently from church and university groups, the revolution is described as a humanist one, a struggle against misery. To other visitors, with left-wing views, the talk is of 'scientific change' with no interest in achieving 'perfect democracy', but a revolution aimed at a 'total social transformation.'"⁵⁶

The policy of maintaining a facade or semblance of political pluralism led to the survival of minor opposition groups and one (heavily censored) opposition newspaper (*La Prensa*) for the benefit of foreign visitors and public opinion abroad. (The principles of censorship were identical to those found in all communist systems. Thus for example "... censors objected to the publication of a story [in *La Prensa*] about a 96-year old woman who had committed suicide, charging that the story was 'an attack on the psychic health of the people and, therefore, an attack against the security of the state.'"⁵⁷

Many of the techniques for utilizing supportive foreigners resembled those employed by Cuba. Thus while Cuba set up the Venceremos Bri-

⁵⁵Douglas W. Payne: "The 'Mantos' of Sandinista Deception", *Strategic Review*, Spring 1985, pp. 9-10.

⁵⁶Jon Vinocur: "Nicaragua: A Correspondent's Portrait", *New York Times*, August 16, 1983, p. A4.

⁵⁷Joel Brinkley: "Nicaraguan Urges U.S. to Rein In Rebels", *New York Times*, January 4, 1985, p. A3.

gade, composed of sympathizers to assist in the harvest of sugarcane as an act of revolutionary solidarity, Nicaragua attracted groups to harvest coffee beans; volunteers from abroad were also used in other projects and in various advisory capacities.⁵⁸

In contrast to Cuba, Nicaragua did not have a preeminent figure, like Castro, to impress visiting foreign dignitaries; on the other hand, all members of the junta made themselves readily available to visitors. Thus it was noted that "Almost any visiting American official, no matter how low his rank, can now expect to meet with at least two of the nine co-mandantes. . . . Non-official American visitors . . . can count on at least one. . . ." The legal director of the Texas Civil Liberties Union, James C. Harrington wrote: "We met Sergio Ramirez [member of the junta], two department directors. . . . Vice-Foreign Minister, Nora Astorga (a charming heroine of the revolution) . . . the Minister of Culture (Father Ernesto Cardenal) and . . . two of the three Electoral Commission members. . . . We broke mid-day bread with three Supreme Court judges. . . ." Even a reporter for *Playboy* magazine, hardly a revolutionary publication, found the leaders very accessible: "After the interviews were under way, some of the Nicaraguan leaders began inviting Marcelo [the photographer] and me, well, to hang out with them. Things we did in Managua: go with Borge to a prison farm for Mosquito Indian counter-revolutionaries; watch father Cardenal put on an all-day Latin-American song festival . . . dinner at Ramirez house."⁵⁹

Tomas Borge, the minister of internal security, (political police) was particularly active meeting important visitors. He had a special office for receiving delegations from abroad:

"Borge has two different offices. One . . . is located in the Silvio Mayorga building where he meets religious delegations and delegations from democratic political parties. In this office Borge has photographs of children, gilded, carved crucifixes, and a Bible or two. Before Borge meets

with religious delegations he usually memorizes Bible passages which he can quote. . . . Borge's real office, where he fulfills his duties as Interior Minister, is located . . . in Bello Horizonte. . . . In that office there are no crucifixes or Bibles—only Marxist literature and posters of Marx, Engels, and Lenin."⁶⁰

Borge also seemed to specialize in taking important visitors on tours of (model) prisons (such as mentioned by the *Playboy* reporter) including Gunter Grass, the famous German writer who was suitably impressed: ". . . in this tiny, sparsely populated land. . . Christ's words are taken literally."⁶¹ By contrast the "Representatives of the committee [Lawyers' Committee for International Human Rights] were refused permission to visit El Chipote, the main security police detention center in Managua. The report says that 'Minister Borge explained that the presence of a stranger could interrupt the process of interrogation and persuasion.'"⁶²

Nicaraguan political hospitality and the political tourism it catered to benefited to an unusual degree from domestic political conditions in the United States. These included the hostility to President Reagan and his various policies (including his attempts to put pressure on the regime in Nicaragua), the isolationism inspired by Vietnam and the eagerness of former Vietnam protesters and social critics to find new, but similar causes to champion. For such groups—just as Vietnam in the 60's provided, in the words of Susan Sontag, a key to the systematic critique of the United States—Nicaragua in the 1980's offered similar possibilities. No wonder that prominent figures in the anti-war movement—and vocal critics of American society—found it congenial and natural to become supporters of the Sandinistas. Their ranks included William Sloan Coffin, Benjamin Spock, Alan Ginsberg, Linus Pauling, George Wald, Egbal Ahmad, Noam Chomsky, Harvey Cox, David Dellinger, Richard Falk, John Gerasi, Robert McAfee Brown, Pete Seeger, Adrienne Rich, Jessica Mitford, the Berrigan brothers, Abbie Hoffman and many other Vietnam era protest-celebrities.

⁵⁸See for example Raymond Bonner: "A Melting Pot Is Converging in Nicaragua", *New York Times*, September 12, 1982; "U.S. Volunteers Help Nicaragua With the Harvest", *New York Times*, February 16, 1984; "Senior Citizens Planning to Help Nicaragua Harvest" (AP), *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, January 9, 1985.

⁵⁹*Miami Herald cited.*

⁶⁰James C. Harrington: "Countering Nicaragua's Contrasts", *The Texas Observer*, June 15, 1984, p. 17.

⁶¹"Playboy Interview: The Sandinistas", *Playboy*, September 1983, p. 58.

⁶²"Nicaragua's State Security: Behind the Propaganda Mask—An Interview with Alvaro José Baldizon Aviles", Briefing Paper, *Institute on Religion and Democracy*, Washington, D.C., September, 1985, p. 2.

⁶³Gunter Grass: "Epilogue: America's Backyard" in Martin Diskin, ed.: *Our Backyard*, New York, 1983, p. 247.

⁶⁴Shirley Christian: "Nicaragua Police Criticized on Rights", *New York Times*, April 5, 1985.

There was a tendency in some instances to project upon present day Nicaragua the atmosphere of American college campuses of the 1960's. For example: "Here was a place seemingly run by the kind of people who were Sixties radicals. Wherever we went, people were young, singing political folk songs and chanting, 'Power to the People'. One night there was even a Pete Seeger concert in town!"⁶⁵ As a more detached observer put it: "For . . . the backpacking 'sandinistas', Nicaragua seems to be a way station on a trip back through the 1960's."⁶⁶

The Sandinistas were able to rely on a vast network of support groups and organizations within the United States which helped to prepare and funnel tour groups to Nicaragua. Those specialising in the organization of tours—as distinct from the even more numerous support groups of more diffuse purpose—included Marazul, Inc., The National Network in Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People, Nicaragua-Honduras Education Project, the Nuevo Instituto de Centro Amrica, The Guardian Weekly, Tropical Tours, Tur-Nica (the official Nicaraguan agency), United States Out of Central America and Witness for Peace (associated with the American Friends Service Committee). All these organizations had many local chapters nationwide.⁶⁷ The scope of the phenomenon (of political tourism) may be glimpsed from a listing of tours advertised and organized by Marazul Tours (one of the tour operators) for the period November 1984 and April 1985.

The groups listed included: the Marazul Study Tour, Mining Conference, Witness for Peace-West Virginia, Harvest Brigade (six of them), Pan American Nurses Conference, Witness for Peace-Arizona, New Orleans Study Tour, Boston Nicaragua Study Tour, Christian Theological Seminary, Teachers College Study Group, NICA Spanish Language Program, Health Pac Study Tour, OXFAM America Group, Witness for Peace-Kansas, Guardian Study Tour, Witness for Peace-Baltimore, Bengis Social Service Group, Militant/Perspective Mundial Tour, Vassar College Study Group, and many others. Such tours have been complemented by the speaking tours of various representatives of the Nicaragua

government within the United States, energetically visiting campuses and making use of the American media.⁶⁸

According to the Nicaraguan Minister of Foreign Trade 100,000 Americans visited Nicaragua since the revolution in 1979. Many tours have been organized by the Protestant Committee for Aid and Development⁶⁹—highlighting the important part played by American churches in fostering political tourism to Nicaragua. While past political tours, including those of Cuba, have also benefited from the cooperation and sympathy of churchmen, the support extended to the Nicaraguan regime by the Churches has been exceptionally warm and wide ranging. It included not only fund raising and organising tour groups but also lobbying politicians. House Speaker Thomas O'Neill, influenced by Maryknoll nuns, reached the conclusion that American non-intervention and withdrawal of support for the guerrillas would "... allow them [the Nicaraguan people] to make their own free choice of government."⁷⁰ Personal influences of another kind were also at work in the case of Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa, "a long time friend" of Miguel D'Escoto, foreign minister of Nicaragua. Harkin, with Senator Kerry of Massachusetts visited Managua and subsequently lobbied forcefully against aid to the guerrillas.⁷¹ Harkin and Kerry bolstered their pro-Sandinista position with a study prepared by the Institute of Policy Studies in Washington, an organization specializing in the production and dissemination of the critiques of the United States and capitalism.⁷²

Hollywood celebrities have been another group attracted to the Marxist-Leninist regime in Nicaragua and successfully enlisted in its support. For example, it was reported that

Two years ago at a conference in Mexico City, Rosario Murillo, the wife of . . . Daniel Ortega Saavedra, asked a well-connected American, Blase Bonpane, to organize delegations of prominent American celebrities to Nicaragua. . .

⁶⁸See for example "Nicaraguan official on campus today", *Massachusetts Daily Collegian* (Amherst), May 7, 1985 (this refers to the visit by Ernesto Cardenal); and Athleen Elington: "Visiting student activists outline views", *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, October 17, 1985.

⁶⁹Stephen Kinzer: "Sandinistas' Visitors: Motives Touch Off Dispute", *New York Times*, July 4, 1985.

⁷⁰Margaret Shapiro: "The Roots of O'Neill's Dissent", *Washington Post*, June 5, 1985.

⁷¹See for example Loring Swain: "Betrayal for those who seek freedom", *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, April 29, 1985.

⁷²Shirley Christian: "Nicaragua Week in the Capital", *New York Times*, April 19, 1985.

⁶⁵Playboy cited p. 58.

⁶⁶Cody cited in *Washington Post*.

⁶⁷See for example Jack Foley: "Nicaragua is invaded by American visitors", *San Jose Mercury News*, October 7, 1984, for an account of the influx of Western European visitors see Warren Hoge: "Nicaraguan Scene: Fiery Slogans, Designer Jeans", *New York Times*, January 6, 1982.

Mr. Bonpane, a former Maryknoll priest and professor of Latin American history at the University of California at Los Angeles, is a liberation theologian sympathetic to the Sandinistas. He understood... the impact Hollywood stars could have on American public opinion....

Many of the most visible critics of U.S. Policy come from Hollywood—celebrities like Ed Asner, Mike Douglas and Susan Anspach.

Much of Hollywood interest in Nicaragua can be traced to Blase Bonpane who helped organize a nine-city tour with singer Jackson Browne, actors Mike Farrell and Diane Ladd, former Georgia State Senator Julian Bond and others. The tour was aimed at rallying opposition to U.S. intervention in Nicaragua.⁷⁷³

Another interesting example of pro-Sandinista lobbying (linked to political hospitality extended by the Nicaraguan authorities) was provided by the Washington law firm of Reichler and Applebaum, an officially registered agent of the Nicaraguan government. The firm organized a team of Americans to investigate within Nicaragua the alleged atrocities of the guerrillas with the assistance of the government (and its resident sympathizers) which gave them "... in country transportation, boarding, housing, office space, staff and, one can assume, the witnesses themselves."⁷⁷⁴ The timing of this inquiry coincided with the Congressional vote on aid to the guerrillas.

Thus the Sandinista regime has built up a large and influential lobby in the United States adept at influencing both the media and public opinion and members of the Congress and highly successful in diverting attention from the substantial human rights violations committed by the Nicaraguan authorities.⁷⁷⁵

As in the case of political tourists in other communist countries, the visitors' apparent suspension of critical faculties enhanced the quality of

⁷⁷³Marshall Ingverson: "From actors to advocates, Americans are flocking to Nicaragua", *Christian Science Monitor*, November 23, 1984, p. 6; for further references to this nine city tour see also "Radical Chic ... Returns" in Review and Outlook, *The Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 1984.

⁷⁷⁴Jim Denton: "Contra Atrocities, or a Covert Propaganda War? A Lobbying Drive Began in Managua", *Wall Street Journal*, April 23, 1985.

⁷⁷⁵See for example Fred Barnes: "The Sandinista Lobby", *New Republic*, January 20, 1986.

their experiences in Nicaragua. A professor of computer studies (at Hampshire College in Amherst, Mass.) was struck by "the comfortable presence of government soldiers. Nicaragua is a country where nobody is afraid of the soldiers... They are people. You can walk up and talk to them."⁷⁷⁶ Poet Adrienne Rich described revolutionary Nicaragua as a "society that took poets seriously" and approvingly quoted someone who told her that "You'll love Nicaragua. Everyone there is a poet".⁷⁷⁷ Father Richard Preston of Lansing, Michigan reached the conclusion that "the reign of God has arrived in Nicaragua", as well as the "reign of truth, hope and justice".⁷⁷⁸ With good reasons did Karen Martin-Schramm (of the Center for Global Services and Education of the Lutheran Church in Minneapolis) observe that "many Americans journey to Nicaragua as 'a matter of faith'".⁷⁷⁹ Sergio Ramirez Mercado, a member of the junta put it in a more understated way: "Religious, social workers, actors, writers. They all come to resolve their doubts."⁷⁸⁰

Not surprisingly Jaime Chamorro Cardenal, an editor of *La Prensa*, the hard pressed opposition newspaper saw it differently: "Some honestly come to investigate, but most come to confirm what they already believe... They are sent down here by groups that are partial to the Sandinistas, and once they get here they are quite ingenuous. They believe everything they are told."⁷⁸¹

Not all conducted tours produced the desired results. At least two participants of what seemed a typical tour (organized by the Center for Global Service and Education of Augsburg College, in Minneapolis) returned disillusioned. They provided revealing details of the techniques of political hospitality they experienced. They wrote:

During the two week period our group was subject to incessant thinly disguised indoctrination... We were exposed to a total of 45 speakers of which only 7 spoke from a pro U.S. perspective and we were conditioned to distrust them before and after they spoke to us...

⁷⁷⁶Computer teacher felt 'at home' in Nicaragua", *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, February 6, 1985.

⁷⁷⁷Poet Adrienne Rich mixes poetry, politics in talk at U. Mass.", *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, September 29, 1983.

⁷⁷⁸The reign of God has arrived in Nicaragua", *Catholic Weekly*, March 25, 1983, p. 7.

⁷⁷⁹San José Mercury News cited.

⁷⁸⁰Quoted in AP Report "The 'other side' of sharpening confrontations", *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, September 30, 1983.

⁷⁸¹Kinzer cited, *New York Times*, July 1985.

The Center organized full itineraries for each country [Mexico and El Salvador were added to Nicaragua] which allowed only short periods of time on our own. However the language barrier and unfamiliar environments still kept us dependent on the staff.

... Another technique was ... setting aside a period in the evenings for what they called 'reflection time'. During these sessions they always encouraged discussions putting emphasis on our 'feelings' rather than on facts. These seemed to be directed conversations...

... Throughout the trip they tried to get us emotionally involved.

... We visited the state-owned Helanica Textile Factory where a spokeswoman appealed to us to tell the people in the U.S. that they did not want war.

... The same no war theme was repeated by the Minister of Education, Fernando Cardinal... During his session, Cardinal told us he sometimes spoke to groups like ours two or three times a day and that nine out of ten of them represented protestant churches.

The forced relocation of the Mosquito Indians was 'justified' by another priest Justinian Lieb...

... the travel seminar is designed, organized and conducted to overwhelm the participants with information which supports the anti-U.S., pro-Sandinista bias of the Center for Global Service and Education.⁸²

Since they were *not* uncritically disposed to begin with, these two visitors managed to learn some facts about Nicaraguan life their hosts had not intended to bring to their attention, as for example the threat of the loss of ration cards as an inducement to vote in the (1984 Fall) elections. They nonetheless concluded that "... it is extremely difficult to maintain a balanced perspective after being exposed to these combined techniques for a period of two weeks. If we had not had each other to talk to we

⁸²Report on Travel Seminar Conducted by Center for Global Service and Education, Augsburg College, Minneapolis, MN, Congressional Record - House, April 16, 1985, pp. H 2043, 2044, 2046.

might have begun to question our own position... We felt it is virtually impossible for anyone who is naive and uninformed, and trusting of the Center, not to succumb to this type of brainwashing."⁸³

In a rare instance of a favorably predisposed visitor becoming disillusioned, Abbie Hoffman (who led a group himself) wrote: "When I came here I was very sympathetic... This [minister of education Cardenal] turned me around. They are seeking to change legions of their children the way Hitler did. They are trying to create something like a Hitler Youth Corps." Hoffman was referring to the Minister's speech on the regime's determination to create a "new man".⁸⁴

Robert Leiken, another former American sympathizer reacted negatively to the culinary manifestations of political hospitality: "In a private state dining room I ate a sumptuous meal with a comandante at a long table attended by five servants. The image of the protruding stomachs of the 'spoiled ones of the revolution' intruded while we consumed our meringue pie."⁸⁵ He observed with dismay the rise of "A Sandinista *nomenklatura*" benefiting of hard currency stores, luxury restaurants and the former mansions of the Somoza dynasty, called "protocol houses" (as in Cuba). A recent *New York Times* report confirmed his observations: "... the most striking is the emergence of what one diplomat here calls 'the Sandinista *nomenklatura*'—a new revolutionary bureaucratic elite of *co-mandantes* and other high officials, insulated from the hardships and privations endured by the rest of the populace. They live in homes expropriated from the old bourgeoisie... They can shop at special 'dollar stores' reserved for diplomats and enjoy privileges ranging from reserved box seats at the baseball stadium to unlimited supplies of rationed gasoline and water."⁸⁶ (The expensive tastes of the leaders was also illustrated by the purchase of \$3500 worth of designer glasses by Daniel Ortega and his wife on their visit to New York in 1985 at Cohen's Fashion Optical store on the Upper East side.⁸⁷) At every level political criteria exerts influence on living standards as in the case of allocating housing for the poor: "Managua's squatters ... feel they are being passed over in favor of Sandinista activists. In particular their complaints are directed toward

⁸³Ibid. p. H 2044.

⁸⁴Quoted in "Abbie pal sours on Red regime", *New York Post*, January 1, 1985.

⁸⁵Robert S. Leiken: "Nicaragua's Untold Stories", *The New Republic*, October 8, 1984, p. 17.

⁸⁶Larry Rohter: "Managua Rule Seen as Leftist Hybrid", *New York Times*, March 3, 1985, p. 3; for another discussion of such inequalities see Carlos Rangel: "The Double Lives of Nicaragua's Commandantes", *Wall Street Journal*, December 1, 1984.

⁸⁷Maureen Dowd: "Reporter's Notebook: Ortega Chic", *New York Times*, October 25, 1985.

a showplace housing project . . . in southwest Managua. There, 860 new homes have been built and occupied by families chosen through a system in which . . . political loyalties were one of the principal criteria.⁷⁸

Such news items rarely reach the political tourists and if they do they are likely to dismiss them as either untrue, or atypical, or insignificant; their beliefs will not be eroded by information at variance with their convictions⁷⁹ as long as they remain committed to a vision of a superior alternative to their own corrupt society.

It may thus be concluded that political tourism brings no greater enlightenment—and probably far less—than ordinary tourism does in our times: "It was once believed that as international travel and communications became easier, international understanding would grow. It has not. . . Western tourists . . . return, in spite of their bulging photograph albums, as ignorant as when they set out."⁸⁰

Although I emphasized throughout this article the importance of favorable predisposition on the part of political tourists as a major determinant of the success of political hospitality, the latter continues to play an important part in confirming such predispositions and providing experimental support for hopes and longings which—as contemporary history has shown—can be projected upon a number of different societies at different times.

⁷⁸"Nicaragua Squatters Increase But the Outlook Looks Grim", *New York Times*, February 18, 1985, p. A6.

⁷⁹For example Robert Leiken's recent "The Nicaraguan Tangle", in the *New York Review of Books* (December 5, 1985) prompted a sympathizer I know to seriously consider ending his subscription to the magazine rather than contemplate the information put forward. Those favorably disposed are also likely to dismiss "Comandante Bayardo Arce's Secret Speech before the Nicaraguan Socialist Party" published by the State Department in March, 1985 either as a questionable document, possibly forged, or a statement of no importance.

⁸⁰Michael Howard: "The Bewildered American Raj", *Harpers*, March, 1985, p. 58.

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